

With so many great questions from our in-person and online audience, we were unable to ask all of the questions to the presenters during the event. The Agrilinks team reached out to the presenters to follow up on a few unanswered questions. Below are their responses:

Richard Tinsley, Colorado State University:

1. Question: How much of the trade and marketing goes around the government across those leaky borders?

Response: "It is very difficult to collect data on this because it is mostly illegal. While there are a few estimates for certain commodities, time periods and countries, I am not aware of any reliable global estimates. There are cases where the cross border trade is a very important part of trade, e.g. flows across borders between Gambia and Senegal during periods of time when the domestic prices in the two countries are significantly different."

2. Question: How much of the limited action is a result of limited financial resources for the government? (Which is basically stalled for lack of tax base.)

Response: Limited resources play an important role in initiatives such as cash and food transfers and food and fertilizer subsidies. Lack of effective institutions to assure effective targeting, which could reduce costs, is another problem in some countries. However, political economy factors are extremely important for the allocation of whatever scarce resources governments control and protecting poor people's food security and nutrition does not appear to play a dominant role in resource allocation.

David Soroko, Crown Agents/Weidemann, Senior Advisor:

1. Question: The main holders and managers of global cereals stocks are multinationals at this point. Also, what is the impact on global cereals prices of commodity market financialization...i.e. the entrance of speculators and their taking positions in cereals markets as pure speculation?

Response: Speculation through future markets played an important role in the world market price fluctuations for some commodities such as corn and soybeans. Speculation also played an important role in the rice market mostly by manipulating supplies and not really through futures markets. Export bans by India, China, Vietnam and other countries were very important and could, I suppose, be called speculation.

2. Question: USAID invested more than \$4.9 billion in 240 agribusiness and agriculture value chain projects between 1998 and 2012. 184 of those projects supported some form of rural collective action (producer organizations, farmer group business, cooperatives, etc.) yet this massive investment and long term perspective has yielded no formalized lessons learned, recognizing that the firms and NGOs that implemented those projects have their own lessons learned. Why has support to agrarian collective action made so little progress?

Response: I have no solid knowledge on that. Sorry.

Robert Navin, independent food/trade advisor to USAID:

1. Question: Malawi recently lost much of its strategic grain stock due to poor stock management. In response, some donors have again helped with food aid, etc. Is this what donors should be doing in terms of creating the correct incentives?

Response: That is a good question. No, donors should not reward poor stock management but remember that the consequences of not providing food aid in an emergency situation, whether caused by poor management or not, will be felt by the poor who had no say in the management. So, I do not like to use starvation among the poor as an incentive for government to improve stock management. You may remember that an international organization advised the Malawian government to sell some of its stock after which Malawi had a shortfall in maize production. The lesson is to be very careful with advice from outside a country unless you are willing to take the consequences of wrong advice. Better than advice on how much to hold in stock we should help strengthening the national capacity to make evidence-based decisions on that.

Victor Pinga, SPRING project:

1. Question: How can we even begin to think about changing or influencing the food systems in LMICs when we have ourselves a food system here in the US that is difficult to change and to work in the interest of public health and nutrition? The private sector incentives are just very distant from the public's interest. (In health and nutrition.)

Response: That is a good point closely linked to the political economy issues: knowing what to do and having the capacity to do it does not mean that it gets done if the power structures are not supporting it. I am still maintaining that strengthening the evidence base with emphasis on the likely consequences of alternative action by either the public or the private sector is likely to enlighten policy choices both at home and abroad.

Micheal Tesfasilassie, FSIN:

1. Question: Can the WTO set some rules for minimum amount of food to be exported/imported by the countries to protect the international market prices?

Response: As far as I know, WTO does not have the power to do so. What I am arguing for are enforceable rules to avoid abrupt changes in food exports that have serious negative effects on other countries. The main reason for having a WTO is for nations to come together to establish rules and behavior for orderly trade. It is not orderly trade when a major exporter of an important food commodity can put in place an export ban with very short notice. However, although there is text in the WTO documents to avoid that, there are so enforceable rules.

Rose Kadende-Kaiser, Season of Health:

1. Question: And also - can WTO set rules that protect countries at risk of food insecurities in the short term from exporting food commodities?

Response: No, but each exporting country can decide whether to export or not.